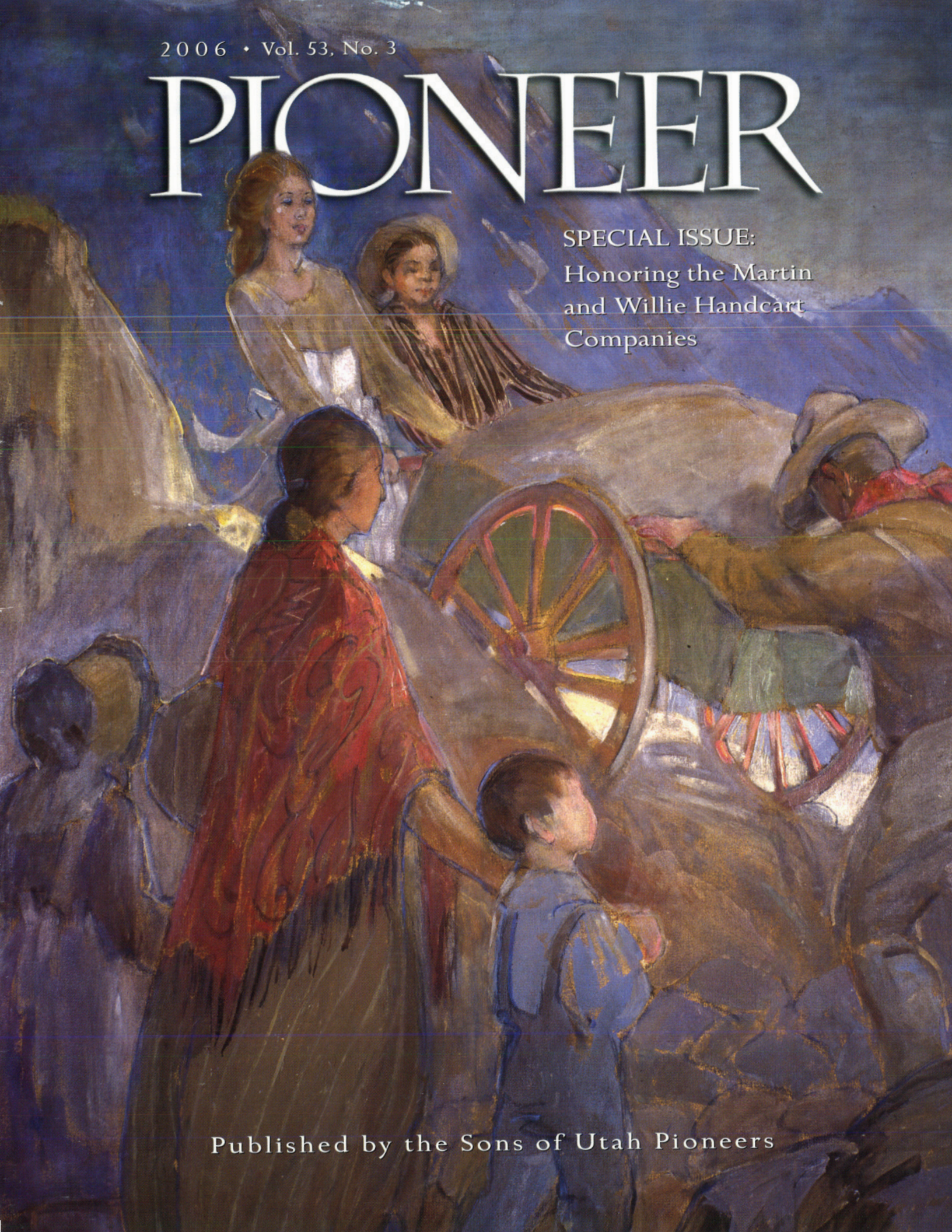


2006 • Vol. 53, No. 3

# PIONEER



SPECIAL ISSUE:  
Honoring the Martin  
and Willie Handcart  
Companies

Published by the Sons of Utah Pioneers



# PIONEER

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**LEFT:** Elder Merrill J. Bateman of the Presidency of the Seventy with SUP President Grant E. Barton at the Sons of the Utah Pioneers Days of '47 Sunrise Service, July 24, 2006. See page 18.

**COVER ART:** Handcart Pioneers *by Minerva Teichert*, © *by Intellectual Reserve, Inc.*, courtesy Museum of Church History and Art.

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### MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the National Society of the Sons of Utah Pioneers is to preserve the memory and heritage of the early pioneers of the Utah Territory.

We honor the pioneers for their faith in God, devotion to family, loyalty to church and country, hard work and service to others, courage in adversity, personal integrity, and unyielding determination.

The society also honors present-day pioneers worldwide in many walks of life who exemplify these same qualities of character. It is further intended to teach these same qualities to the youth who will be tomorrow's pioneers.



# President's Message

By Grant E. Barton



Names of the handcart pioneers, posted at Iowa City

## Why the Sacrifice?

More than 200 people of the Martin and Willie Handcart companies died. Why were they willing to risk death to come West? Could it be that whether they lived or died was not as important as that they lived right and that the Lord accepted of their sacrifice? Years ago, while supervising the writing of the Adult Manuals for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, one writing committee labored for years on a manual that was never printed. Were they discouraged? Were they mad? No! Because they received a revealed assurance that their sacrifice was acceptable to the Lord. And it was enough.

A few weeks ago, I traveled to Iowa City, where the railroad ended and the trek began. Thousands celebrated the Sesquicentennial of the handcart trek—a unique experiment in the history of westward migration. Near a four-lane road entitled “Mormon Trek Boulevard” there is a large grassy field called, to

this day, “The Campground,” where the Martin, Willie and other companies weighed out their 17 pounds, received their single pole tents and handcarts, and began their bone-wearying journey of almost half a continent. What drove them? What put the steel in their backbones?

## Three Reasons

Why were the handcart pioneers willing to risk losing legs to the cold, or even laying down their lives, to make the trek? I came away from Iowa City convinced that (1) *The Call of a Prophet*, (2) *A desire to raise a family in Zion*, and (3) *The fire of temple covenants burning in their bones was what gave our pioneer forefathers the fire for the deed . . . come what may*.

We, like the pioneers, are equally blessed to live the principles taught by prophets, to establish Zion, and to live (and if necessary, die) by our temple covenants. On a list at the Mormon Pioneer Campground, I found the name of my relative, the father of a family, who died near Chimney Rock, secure in the knowledge that his sacrifice had great eternal meaning for himself and for his numerous posterity.

## Remember . . . Remember

Many times in the scriptures, the Lord admonishes us to “Remember, Remember.” This year, let us each carry in our pocket the symbol of our

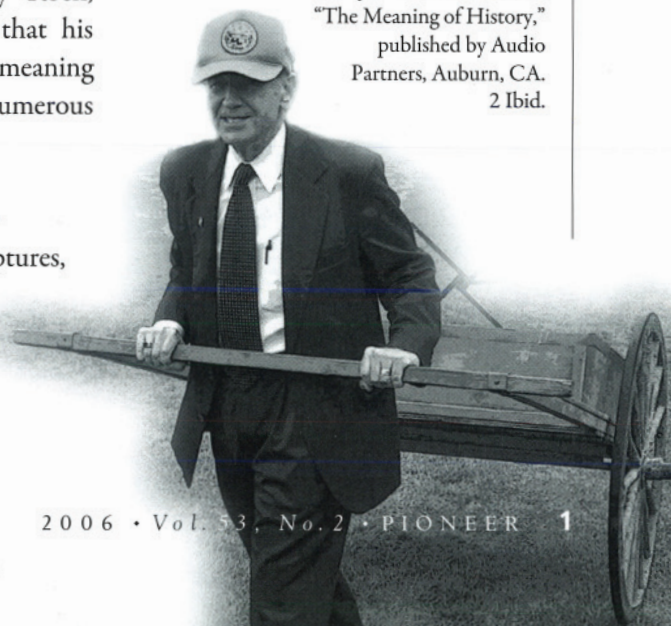
willingness to remember those who were willing to sacrifice the last full measure of devotion at Martin's Cove. *Let's each purchase and carry with us a “Remember Martin's Cove” medallion!*

It's appropriate that we take time often to remember the values of our forebears. Renowned historian Will Durant said “We are drowned with news, but we are starved of history.”<sup>1</sup> Remembering our noble ancestors is to remember our moorings, our roots. “History,” said Durant, “is the present, rolled up for action.”<sup>2</sup> Every generation must rediscover the principles our ancestors used to establish our civilization . . . principles to which we must recommit in order that it may be perpetuated. ▣

Grateful for the opportunity to serve . . .  
—Grant E. Barton

## Notes

- 1 Will and Ariel Durant, *The Lessons of History*, Disc 1, Tracks 7–9, “The Meaning of History,” published by Audio Partners, Auburn, CA.
- 2 Ibid.





# THE STRUGGLE *Willie & Martin*





# TO SURVIVE: *Handcart Pioneers*

*Susan Easton Black, Professor of Church History and Doctrine, Brigham Young University*

*"If courage and endurance make a story, if human kindness and helpfulness and brotherly love in the midst of raw horror are worth recording, this half-forgotten episode of the Mormon migration is one of the great tales of the West and of America."<sup>1</sup> —Wallace Stegner*

**F**rom 1856 to 1860 nearly three thousand Latter-day Saints successfully pulled their earthly possessions in wheeled carts from Iowa City to the Salt Lake Valley. The tragic exception were pioneers of the Willie and Martin Handcart companies in 1856. Late starts, unexpected delays, insufficient provisions, and unseasonable weather are reasons they encountered problems and did not pull their own carts into Salt Lake City. In remembrance of their struggles in Wyoming's frigid climes, the story of the Willie and Martin Handcart companies is presented. Learn of the problems that beset the pioneers in these companies from the outset at Liverpool until they reached Martin's Cove in Wyoming and of the heroic rescue of the weary sojourners.

## **Handcart Plan**

In September 1855, Brigham Young, President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, wrote to Franklin D. Richards, president of the Church's European Mission, "We cannot afford to purchase wagons and teams as in times past, I am consequently thrown back upon my old plan—to make

hand-carts, and let the emigration foot it." Confident of the plan, Brigham added, "They can come just as quick, if not quicker, and much cheaper—can start earlier and escape the prevailing sickness which annually lays so many of our brethren in the dust."<sup>2</sup> In response to Young's letter, Richards penned, "The plan proposed is novel, . . . the device of inspiration, and the Lord will own and bless it."<sup>3</sup>

On October 29, 1855, in the "Thirteenth General Epistle of the First Presidency of the Church" the handcart plan was presented: "Let the Saints, who intend to immigrate the ensuing year, understand that they are expected to walk and draw their luggage across the plains."<sup>4</sup> News of the epistle and the proposed plan to transport possessions in wooden carts was well received by hopeful immigrants. One expectant Irish immigrant, musician, J. D. T. McAllister, was so enthusiastic he took poetic license with the epistle, composing "The Handcart Song":

*Ye Saints that dwell on Europe's shore  
Prepare yourselves with many more  
To leave behind your native land  
For sure God's Judgments are at hand.  
Prepare to cross the stormy main  
Before you do the Valley gain,  
And with faithful make a start  
To cross the plains with your handcart.*



## Chorus

*Some must push and some must pull  
As we go marching up the hill,  
As merrily on the way we go  
Until we reach the Valley, oh!*<sup>15</sup>

McAllister, believing himself capable of expressing the sentiment of many, added, "From the oldest to the youngest, all feel Zionward, and are, at the present time, rejoicing in the anticipation of *pulling* or *pushing* a handcart to their home in the west."<sup>16</sup>

As time neared for the first handcart pioneers to immigrate to America, President Richards expressed anxiety about the handcart plan. On February 2, 1856, he wrote, "None of the emigrating Saints have ever crossed the plains who have had greater demands on the shepherds of the flock, than those who will travel in the handcart companies the coming season."<sup>17</sup> Richards believed that the carts were mere copies of those drawn by street sweepers in urban centers. He wondered whether the carts would be sturdy enough for the rough terrain of frontier America, a valid concern since the axles, made of hickory poles, lacked iron skeins for support, and no one had taken them on such a long journey before.

Then, of course, there was the larger issue of safety. Many of those who planned to immigrate were women and children; others were elderly, frail, and infirm. Could these immigrants make the strenuous journey, pulling possessions in carts, and not fall by the wayside?<sup>18</sup> If such were feasible, timing and weather was critical. Late starts, unavoidable delays, and early storms could turn the success of the handcart plan to suffering and tragedy seemingly overnight.

## Troubles from the Outset

The Willie and Martin companies faced significant delays leaving England. The sailing vessel *Thornton* with 764 Latter-day Saints aboard under the leadership of James Willie delayed its departure until May 3, 1856, from Liverpool. The vessel *Horizon*, carrying 856 Saints under the direction of Edward Martin, did not sail until May 25. The late start caused the Willie Company to arrive in Iowa City on June 26. The Martin company arrived 12 days later on July 8.

Latter-day Saint agents in Iowa City were unprepared to outfit the new arrivals. Although they had successfully outfitted three handcart companies earlier that year, providing additional carts and other provisions for

## The typical construction of **THE MORMON HANDCART**

*was made according to Brigham Young's specification usually of oak or hickory:*

**Hubs:** 7 inches in diameter x 8 inches long.

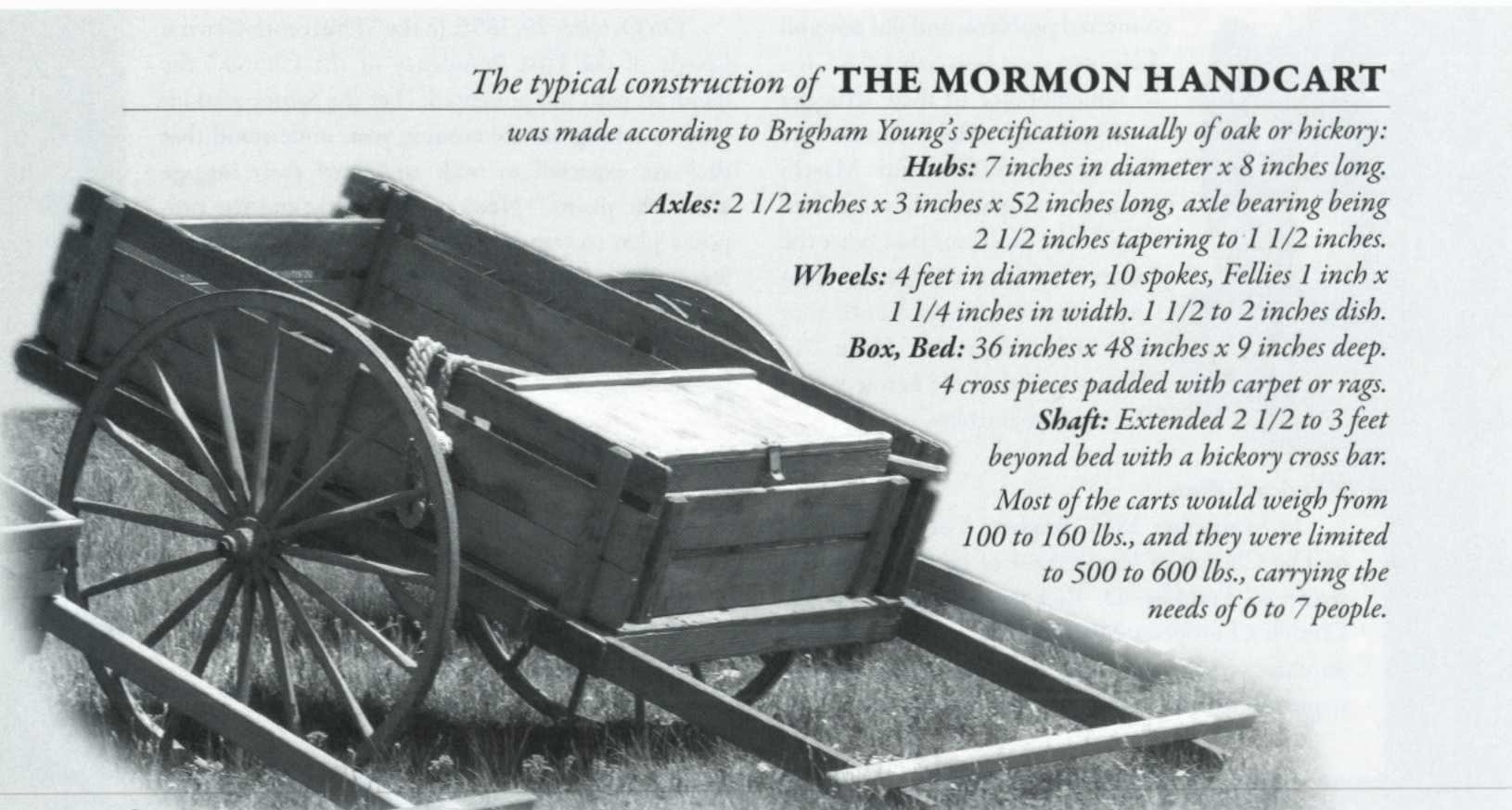
**Axles:** 2 1/2 inches x 3 inches x 52 inches long, axle bearing being 2 1/2 inches tapering to 1 1/2 inches.

**Wheels:** 4 feet in diameter, 10 spokes, Felloes 1 inch x 1 1/4 inches in width. 1 1/2 to 2 inches dish.

**Box, Bed:** 36 inches x 48 inches x 9 inches deep.  
4 cross pieces padded with carpet or rags.

**Shaft:** Extended 2 1/2 to 3 feet beyond bed with a hickory cross bar.

*Most of the carts would weigh from 100 to 160 lbs., and they were limited to 500 to 600 lbs., carrying the needs of 6 to 7 people.*





the unexpectedly large body of late arrivals in these fourth and fifth companies proved difficult. It was not until July 15, nine days after the fourth company reached Iowa City that it was able to proceed west under Captain Willie. The fifth company, under Captain Martin, did not proceed until the 28th, 20 days after arriving in Iowa City. At the time of its departure, the count for the Willie Company was 500 emigrants, "120 handcarts, 5 wagons, 24 oxen, and 45 beef cattle and cows." The Martin Company included 576 emigrants, "146 carts, 7 wagons, 30 oxen, and 50 cows and beef cattle."<sup>9</sup>

For both companies, the journey across Iowa to Florence, Nebraska, was completed in four weeks without incident. The Willie Company arrived at Florence on August 11 and the Martin Company came 11 days later. There, each company paused to repair carts, procure additional supplies, and, most importantly, question whether to proceed to the Salt Lake Valley or wait until the next season to finish their trek. John Chislett, a member in the Willie Company, wrote that Levi Savage proposed the pioneers wait until the next season to advance.

**B**rethren and sisters, . . .  
seeing you are to go  
forward, I will go with you,  
will help you all I can, will  
work with you, . . . suffer  
with you, and, if necessary,  
I will die with you. May God  
in his mercy bless and pre-  
serve us." —Levi Savage

Savage feared the handcart companies "could not cross the mountains with a mixed company of aged people, women, and little children, so late in the season without much suffering, sickness, and death." His opinion was considered and then dismissed as enthusiasm heightened for continuing the westward trek. Although Savage did not concur with the notion of advancing, he expressed a willingness to move forward: "Brethren and sisters, what I have said I know to be true; but seeing you are to go forward, I will go with you, will help you all I can, will work

with you, will rest with you, will suffer with you, and, if necessary, I will die with you. May God in his mercy bless and preserve us."<sup>10</sup> Having traveled so far from their homes in England, the members of the Willie and Martin companies were eager to reach their final destination in the Salt Lake Valley.

#### Trail from Florence to Wyoming

The last handcart pioneer left Florence August 27, 1856. A week later, on September 3, Franklin D. Richards penned, "Everything seems equally propitious for a safe and profitable wind-up at the far end. . . . I





visited Captain Edward Martin's train, several of whom expressed their thanks in a particular manner for being permitted to come out this year."<sup>11</sup> President Richards's optimism for a safe and prosperous journey was shared by Cyrus H. Wheelock, who recorded on September 2, 1856, "All were in good spirits, and generally in good health, and full of confidence that they should reach the mountains in season to escape the severe storms. I have never seen more union among the Saints anywhere than is manifested in the handcart companies."<sup>12</sup> Pioneer Chislett also wrote optimistically: "Everything seemed to be propitious, and we moved gaily forward full of hope and faith. At our camp each evening could be heard songs of joy, merry peals of laughter."<sup>13</sup> Poetess Emily H. Woodmansee captured the cheerful mood of the pioneers in the "Hand-cart Song":

*Hurrah for the Camp of Israel!  
Hurrah for the hand-cart scheme!  
Hurrah! Hurrah! 'tis better far  
Than the wagon and ox-team.*

*And Brigham's their executive,  
He told us the design;  
And the Saints are proudly marching on,  
Along the hand-cart line.<sup>14</sup>*

As the pioneers moved farther west, Levi Savage's fears became a distant, if not forgotten, foreboding of the future. Franklin D. Richards, who had passed the companies en route to the Salt Lake Valley, had promised to send extra supplies to the handcart pioneers with all possible haste. As the pioneers pressed ever onward, few spoke of concerns until late September, when the Willie Company reached Fort Laramie, Wyoming, and learned the promised provisions had not arrived yet.

Knowing their food supply was low, Captain Willie mandated that rations be cut and pioneers travel faster toward their new home in the Salt Lake Valley. A few days later, after assessing their provisions, Willie reduced rations again, this time to only 10 ounces per day of flour. Lacking proper nourishment, few pioneers could sustain the pace needed to reach their destination. Yet the nearly famished sojourners pushed on even when snowcapped mountains in the distance signaled that winter's blanket would soon reach their trail. When snow did fall on the trail several days later, tragedy soon followed. Lack of proper winter clothing and bedding coupled with scanty

*When snow did fall on the trail several days later, tragedy soon followed. Lack of proper winter clothing and bedding coupled with scanty shelter took a deathly toll.*







shelter took a deathly toll. The line of handcarts slowed as the old and infirm succumbed: "They no sooner lost spirit and courage than death's stamp could be traced upon their features. Life went out as smoothly as a lamp ceases to burn when the oil is gone," Chislett wrote. "Many a father pulled his cart, with his little children on it, until the day preceding his death." To Chislett, the immigrants "travelled on in misery and sorrow day after day. . . . Finally we were overtaken by a snowstorm which the shrill wind blew furiously about us. The snow fell several inches deep as we travelled along, but we dared not stop."<sup>15</sup>

Before the snow was a foot deep, provisions were all but gone. "We killed more cattle and issued the meat; but, eating it without bread, did not satisfy hunger, and to those who were suffering from dysentery it did more harm than good," lamented Chislett. "Such craving hunger I never saw before, and may God in his mercy spare me the sight again."<sup>16</sup> Frantic, Captain Willie left the company in search of those who were supposed to be delivering the promised provisions.

The Martin Company's suffering was even greater than that endured by those in the Willie Company. The Martin Company didn't reach Fort Laramie until October 8. "Our provisions by this time had become very scant," recorded Elizabeth Jackson, "and many of the company went to the Fort and sold their watches and jewelry for provisions." Like the Willie Company, those with Captain Martin found no provisions awaiting them. After leaving the fort, Martin, too, shortened daily rations: "The reduction was repeated several times. First, the pound of flour was reduced to three-fourths, then to one-half of a pound, and afterwards to still less per day. However we pushed ahead."<sup>17</sup>

Hunger combined with winter storms slowed their movement one step at a time until death claimed the exhausted. The words of Elizabeth Jackson bespeak the desperate situation of the hapless travelers:

"About nine o'clock I retired. Bedding had become very scarce so I did not disrobe. I slept until, as it appeared to me, about midnight. I was extremely cold. The weather was bitter. I listened to hear if my husband breathed, he lay so still. I could not hear him. I became alarmed. I put my hand on his body, when to my horror I discovered that my worst fears were confirmed. My husband was dead. I called for help to the other inmates of the tent. They could render me no aid; and there was no



alternative but to remain alone by the side of the corpse till morning. Oh, how the dreary hours drew their tedious length along. When daylight came, some of the male part of the company prepared the body for burial. And oh, such a burial and funeral service. They did not remove his clothing—he had but little. They wrapped him in a blanket and placed him in a pile with thirteen others who had died, and then covered him up with snow.”<sup>18</sup>

And thus it was, or as 12-year-old John Bond wrote, “Day after day passes and still no tidings of help coming from the westward.”<sup>19</sup> Captain Martin lamented, “I almost wish God would close my eyes to the enormity of the sickness, hunger and death among the Saints.”<sup>20</sup>

### Rescue

On Saturday, October 4, 1856, Brigham Young was informed that two handcart companies were still en route to the Salt Lake Valley. The next day, at the Church’s semiannual conference, where nearly 12 thousand Saints had gathered, President Young said: “Many of our brethren and sisters are on the plains with hand-carts, and probably many are now 700 miles from this place, and they must be brought here, we must send assistance to them. The text will be, ‘to get them here.’ I want the brethren who may speak to understand that their text is the people on the plains, and the subject matter for this community is send for them and bring them in before the winter sets in. . . . *Go and bring in those people now on the plains.*”<sup>21</sup>

The people’s response was immediate. Women darned socks, patches shirts, and finished quilts while men saddled horses and loaded wagons with needed supplies such as flour, beans, rice, and sugar. As the wagons were being loaded, young men bid a quick farewell to family, friends, and sweethearts. Each seemed to know something of the perils ahead on the journey, but the determination to help the pioneers seemed to overshadow any fears. In public and private prayers, Latter-day Saints petitioned the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to temper the weather and assure those on the trail that help was on its way.

On the morning of October 7, the first of what would be 250 rescue teams moved out from the Salt Lake Valley toward the windswept snowdrifts of north central Wyoming. Their journey—some 300 miles—was not easy but their determination was sure. There was no turning back.

On October 21, rescuers reached the Willie Company. “Shouts of joy rent the air; strong men wept till tears ran freely down their furrowed and sun-burnt cheeks.”<sup>22</sup> One member of the rescue team, Harvey Cluff, recalled, “Young maidens and feeble old ladies, threw off all restraint and freely embraced their deliverers expressing in a flow of kisses, the gratitude which their tongues failed to utter.”<sup>23</sup> That evening, songs of Zion were sung around small fires and “peals of laughter issued from the little knots of people as they chatted.”<sup>24</sup>

Some in the first rescue party stayed with the Willie Company and attended to their needs. Others pushed on in search of the survivors of the Martin Company. Among them was George Grant, who explained, “We found the Martin Company in a deplorable condition, they having lost fifty-six of their number since crossing the North Platte, nine days before. . . . There were old men pulling and tugging their carts, sometimes loaded with a sick wife or children—women pulling along sick husbands—little children six to eight years old struggling through the mud and snow. . . . The sight is almost too much for the stoutest of us.”<sup>25</sup>





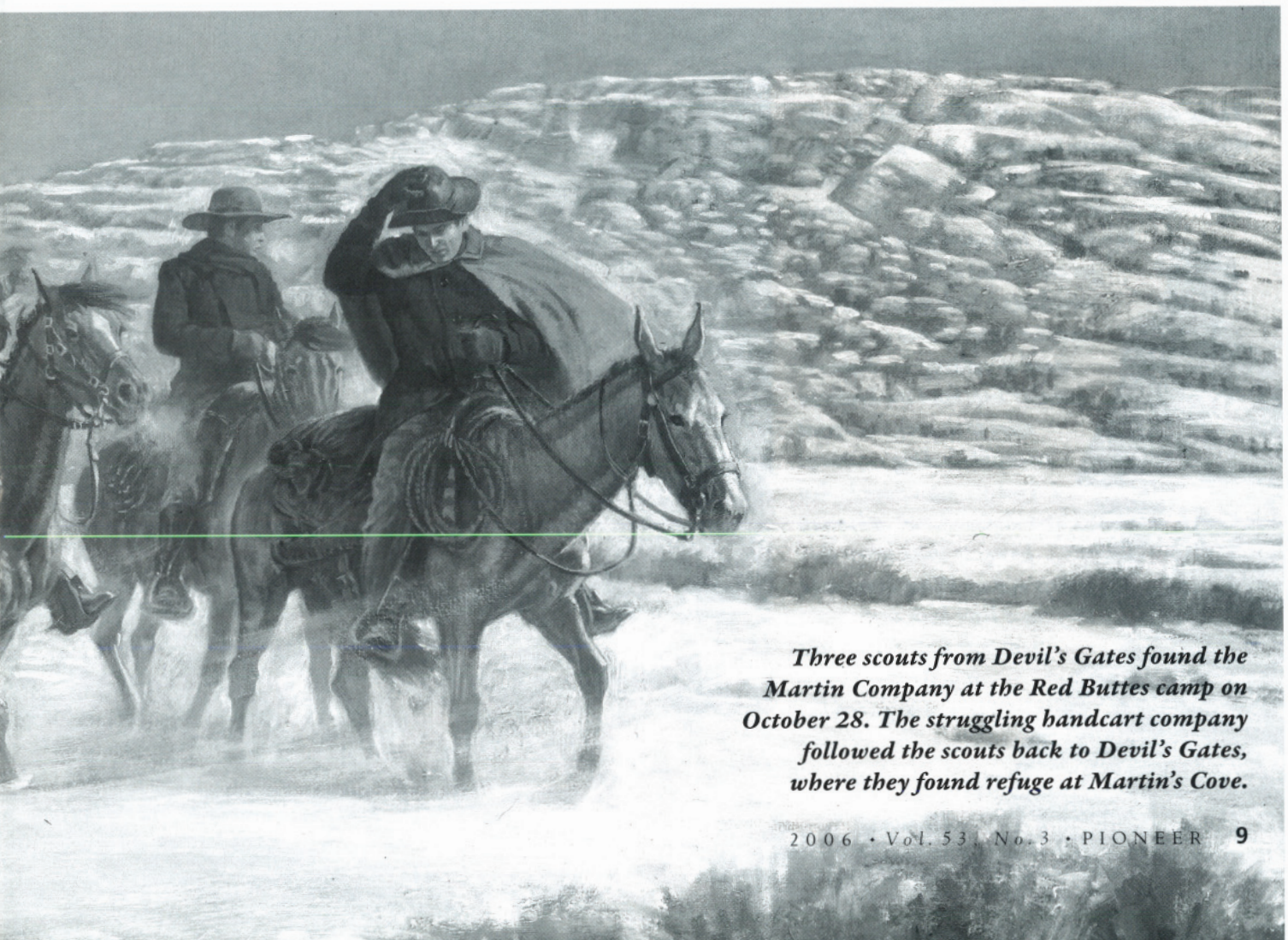
Yet the rescuers went to work, caring for the sojourners as if they were family members. The rescuers set up and took down camp. They cooked the food, drove the wagons, and, when needed, carefully lifted sufferers into their wagons and administered to their needs.

Unfortunately in the process, the weather took a turn for the worse. Each day became colder than the day before. Many had their feet frozen and were unable to walk, having to be lifted into the wagons. Others had their fingers and ears frozen. Anxious to relieve their suffering as soon as possible, George Grant penned, "We will move every day toward the valley if we have to shovel snow to do it, the Lord helping us."<sup>26</sup> Such determination bound the rescuers to the handcart immigrants in the frigid climes of Wyoming as perhaps nothing else could.

It was not until November 9 that the rescuers delivered the first members of the Willie Company to the Salt Lake Valley. Twenty-one days later, on Sunday, November 30, those bringing survivors of the Martin Company began their descent into the valley. President Young, speaking to a congregation assembled in the bowery on Temple Square, said:

"When those persons arrive I do not want to see them put into houses by themselves; I want to have them distributed in the city among the families that have good and comfortable houses. . . . I wish the sisters to go home and prepare to give those who have just arrived a mouthful of something to eat, and to wash them and nurse them up. You know that I would give more for a dish of pudding and milk, or a baked potato and salt, were I in the situation of those persons who have just come in, than I would for all your prayers, though you were to stay here all the afternoon and pray. Prayer is good, but when baked potatoes, and pudding, and milk are needed, prayer will not supply their place on this occasion."<sup>27</sup>

When the handcart pioneers reached the valley, they were taken into warm houses and cared for with tender mercies. Among the recipients of charitable care was 10-year-old Ellen Pucell and her 14-year-old sister, Maggie, both orphans. When the young girls' shoes and stockings were removed, skin came off. Maggie's legs were frozen and needed immediate attention. Ellen's legs were amputated just below her knees. Other immigrants endured similar hardships. However, Church members



*Three scouts from Devil's Gates found the Martin Company at the Red Buttes camp on October 28. The struggling handcart company followed the scouts back to Devil's Gates, where they found refuge at Martin's Cove.*





**Wednesday, November 19, 1856, Little Sandy, Wyoming, Martin Company, Patience Loader Recollection.** A good brother, who owned a wagon told us we could sleep in it. . . . One great blessing we had more food to eat. We got our pound of flour a day and sometimes a little meat and very soon we were all able to ride instead of walking. . . . I can remember how kind the brethren were to us poor, distressed miserable looking creatures. I think we must have looked a very deplorable set of human beings to them when they first met us. What brave men they must have been to start out from Salt Lake City in the middle of winter in search of us poor folks.



in Salt Lake cared for these immigrants, nursing them back to health and helping them get established in their new city.

## Conclusion

Five handcart companies crossed the plains in 1856. Two companies reached the Salt Lake Valley on September 26. The third arrived on October 2. Only the fourth, led by Captain James Willie, and fifth, led by Captain Edward Martin, suffered great tragedies on the western American frontier.

Years later, critics of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints expressed the opinion that the last two handcart companies should not have been permitted to start so late in the season. Listening to these critics was Francis Webster, who at age 26 had been a member of the Willie Company. Instead of supporting the critics, Webster, then an elderly man, said: "I ask you to stop this criticism. You are discussing a matter you know nothing about. Cold historic facts mean nothing here for they give no proper interpretation of the questions involved. Mistake to send the Hand Cart company out so late in the season? Yes. But I was in that Company and my wife was in it. . . . We suffered beyond anything you can imagine and many died of exposure and starvation, but did you ever hear a survivor of that Company utter a word of criticism? Not one of that Company ever apostatized or left the Church because every one of us came through with the absolute knowledge that God lives for we became acquainted with him in our extremities."<sup>28</sup>

Despite the hardship and suffering, much good, as Webster attested, also resulted from the experiences of the Willie and Martin companies. ▀

## Notes

1 Wallace Stegner, "Ordeal by Handcart," in *Collier's*, July 6, 1956, 78–85.

2 "Foreign Correspondence," *Millennial Star* 17, no. 51 (December 22, 1855): 813, as cited in LeRoy R. Hafen and Ann W. Hafen, *Handcarts to Zion: The Story of a Unique Western Migration, 1856–1860* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press in association with the Arthur H. Clark Company, 1960), 29–30.

3 "Editorial of Franklin D. Richards," *Millennial Star* 17, no. 51 (December 22, 1855): 809.

4 "There will of course be means provided for the conveyance of the aged, infirm, and those unable from any cause to walk," First Presidency of the

**R**escuers went to work  
caring for the  
sojourners as if they were  
family members. . . . They  
cooked the food, drove the  
wagons, and, when needed,  
carefully lifted sufferers into  
their wagons and adminis-  
tered to their needs.

Church, "Thirteenth General Epistle," October 29, 1855, printed in *Millennial Star* 18, no. 4 (January 26, 1856): 54.

5 John Daniel Thomas McAllister, "The Handcart Song," as cited in Hafen and Hafen, *Handcarts to Zion*, 66.

6 Letter of John D. T. McAllister, December 31, 1855, Belfast, Ireland, as quoted in the *Millennial Star* 18, no. 3 (January 19, 1856): 47.

7 "Editorial of Franklin D. Richards," *Millennial Star* 18, no. 5 (February 2, 1856): 74.

8 Arrangements were made for a few wagons to transport supplies and ailing individuals in each handcart company.

9 Hafen and Hafen, *Handcarts to Zion*, 93.

10 "Mr. Chislett's Narrative," in T. B. H. Stenhouse, *Rocky Mountain Saints* (New York: 1873, reprinted Salt Lake City: Shepard Book Company, 1904), 317.

11 Franklin D. Richards, September 3, 1856, Florence, Nebraska, as cited in Hafen and Hafen, *Handcarts to Zion*, 98.

12 Diary of Cyrus H. Wheelock, September 1, 1856, as cited in Hafen and Hafen, *Handcarts to Zion*, 97.

13 "Mr. Chislett's Narrative," in Stenhouse, *Rocky Mountain Saints*, 317.

14 Emily H. Woodmancee, "Hand-cart Song," as cited in Hafen and Hafen, *Handcarts to Zion*, 275.

15 "Mr. Chislett's Narrative," in Stenhouse, *Rocky Mountain Saints*, 320–22.

16 *Ibid.*, 324.

17 "Leaves from the Life of Elizabeth Kingford Jackson," (pamphlet), as cited in Hafen and Hafen, *Handcarts to Zion*, 108.

18 *Ibid.*, 111.

19 John Bond was in the Hodgett wagon train behind the Fifth Handcart Company. John Bond, *Handcarts West in '56* (privately issued in Mimeograph form, 1945), 23, as cited in Hafen and Hafen, *Handcarts to Zion*, 112.

20 *Ibid.*, 113.

21 Brigham Young Speech at the Bowery, October 5, 1856, *Deseret News*, October 15, 1856.

22 "Mr. Chislett's Narrative," in Stenhouse, *Rocky Mountain Saints*, 325.

23 "Account of the Rescue," Journal of Harvey H. Cluff, 1836–1868, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

24 "Mr. Chislett's Narrative," in Stenhouse, *Rocky Mountain Saints*, 326.

25 The report of George D. Grant was sent by messengers Joseph A. Young and Abel Garr, who arrived at Salt Lake City at 4 a.m. on November 13, 1856. Captain George Grant's Report from Devil's Gate to President Brigham Young, November 2, 1856, *Deseret News*, November 19, 1856.

26 *Ibid.*

27 Brigham Young remarks on November 30, 1856, *Deseret News*, December 10, 1856.

28 William R. Palmer, "Pioneers of Southern Utah," *Instructor* 79 (May 1944): 217–18.

*Visuals:* Zion Bound: Pushing, Pulling, and Praying by Kimball Warren (2–3) © by Intellectual Reserve, Inc., courtesy Museum of Church History and Art. Handcart photo by John Luke (4). Levi Savage Speaking to the Willie Company by Robert Barrett (5). Handcart family art by Joseph Brickey (6–7). Express Team Seeks the Martin Company by Robert Barrett (8–9). Rescuing handcart companies art by Glen Hopkinson (10).



# HEROES *of the Rescue*



The Martin Handcart Company Rescued by Volunteers by Clark Kelley Price © by Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

**T**hey were quite young—the heroes that rescued the 1200 starving immigrants in the freezing blizzards of Wyoming 150 years ago.<sup>1</sup> Captain George D. Grant was 43; his son, George W. Grant was only 18; Harvey Cluff was 20; Dan Jones was 26; Ephraim Hanks was 29; President Brigham Young was 55.<sup>2</sup>

George Grant, Cyrus Wheelock, and nine others had barely arrived back from their lengthy missions on Saturday, October 4, 1856.<sup>3</sup> The next day, during the semi-annual general conference, Brigham Young called for volunteers for the rescue. These valiant returning missionaries, home only one day, were among the first to come to the stand and express they would go. Within two days several of them were back on the trail!

Here is a brief review of these heroes and the qualities that made them great. They are typical of hundreds of others who participated in the 1856 rescue of the courageous Martin and Willie Handcart companies.

## **President Brigham Young**

The workings of the Spirit were evident in Brigham Young. Others felt the two handcart companies would make it through all right. Those who had most recently encountered the pioneers on the trail calculated that the Willie Company was only 130 miles from the Valley—taking perhaps 15 to 20 days. Since the Martin Company left Iowa City only 13 days after the Willie Company, that meant the Martin Company would probably be less than two weeks behind. And after all, it was still early October—barely autumn . . . not winter.

But, when President Young received information about the handcart companies he called a meeting *that very night* and planned the rescue. Minutes of the meeting read:

“James Ferguson: Brother Willy is in want of teams—one yoke of oxen to a wagon. Prest Young: He ought to have 10 yoke of cattle. . . . James Ferguson: They ought to have 3 tons of flour. Prest Young: They want 5 tons of flour.”<sup>4</sup>





By **Grant E. Barton**  
National President,  
*Sons of Utah Pioneers*

*"Blessed is he that  
keepeth my command-  
ments, whether in life  
or death, and he that is  
faithful in tribulation,  
the reward of the same  
is greater in the  
kingdom of heaven."*

—D&C 58:2, 4

He worried during the night and felt the Holy Ghost was dictating urgency.<sup>5</sup> He later said, "My mind is yonder in the snow, where those immigrating Saints are. . . . I cannot talk about anything . . . but what in every minute or two . . . my mind reverts to them, and the questions [about] my brethren and sisters . . . on the plains . . . force themselves upon me and annoy my feelings all the time."<sup>6</sup>

With nearly twelve thousand Saints in attendance the next day at the Church's semi-annual conference, Brigham told the members that the handcart companies could still be several hundred miles away. He said "The subject matter for this community is send for them and bring them in before the winter sets in. . . . *Go and bring in those people now on the plains.*"<sup>7</sup>

**George D. Grant**, who became the captain of the rescue team, had the skills to deal with the hardships of the frontier. He had been lieutenant-general of the Salt Lake Militia, which was a branch of the newly reconstituted Nauvoo Legion. He was accustomed to

assisting in-coming wagon trains, dealing with Indians and apprehending criminals. Evidence of this has been recorded in the Journal History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. "George D. Grant . . . apprehended five of the thieves who were on their road to the gold mines,"<sup>8</sup> [raised] a company of 15 minute men to start on the morrow in search of Stickenhead and his band of Indians,"<sup>9</sup> and "rode on horseback up toward Ensign Peak, immediately north of G.S.L. City, and overtook two Indians . . . [and] returned with three [stolen] horses."<sup>10</sup>

Captain Grant's 18-year-old son, George W., told the Martin Company at Devil's Gate: "You are not going to freeze tonight. . . . This night I have the strength of a Grant. I never felt so strong before in my life," whereupon he lifted his ax and "with one blow knocked in the whole front" of one of the trapper's cabins, "took each log and split it in four pieces and gave each family one piece."<sup>11</sup>

Later, as the storm continued raging, George W. along with three minutemen associates, spent an entire day lugging carts and carrying people across the icy Sweetwater River into the comparative shelter of some cliffs. In later years, all the boys died from the effects of that sacrifice.<sup>12</sup> When Brigham Young heard of it, he wept and later declared: "That act alone will ensure C. Allen Huntington, George W. Grant, and David P Kimball an everlasting salvation in the Celestial Kingdom of God, worlds, without end."<sup>13</sup>

**Harvey Cluff** had a brother in the Willie Company and being "of an ambitious turn of mind, . . . volunteer[ed] to go."<sup>14</sup>

On October 18, 1856, a fierce blizzard hit the rescue teams head-on at South Pass. Captain Grant felt it advisable to pull his 14 relief wagons three miles off the trail into a protected grove to wait out the storm. Young Harvey Cluff felt strongly he should make their position known. He braved what he called "the Northern Blast," trudged alone uphill through waste-deep snow, and posted a sign on the main road that indicated that Brother Grant's rescue camp was located off the road in a protected hollow of trees near the river.

Unbeknown to the rescuers, Captain Willie's Company had been stalled for days by the same



blizzard just 25 miles further east. It was extremely unlikely that anyone was on the trail in such freezing, white-out conditions. But at that moment, Captain Willie and an associate were fighting through the storm alone, praying they wouldn't lose the road, when they suddenly spotted Harvey Cluff's sign. If Harvey had not followed his prompting, Captain Willie would have passed by them in the night and would have surely perished.

As it was, before daylight, Grant's relief wagons were rolling, and what a pathetic sight they found: "People were huddling together under covers for warmth . . . the limbs of others . . . frozen black and . . . rotting. Children chewing on bark and tree leaves and rawhide from the boots of those who had died (by now numbering sixty-six)."<sup>15</sup> In such circumstances, the inspiration of one man was a God-send to the many (see Alma 48:17).

**Ephraim Hanks** had a spiritual experience from which he knew about the plight of the handcart pioneers even before it was announced. Ephraim wrote that on October 2, 1856, "an ordinary sized man" appeared to him in the night and revealed that the handcart people were in trouble; would he go to help them?"<sup>16</sup> Soon the call came at general conference.

He writes that the following morning "I was wending my way eastward over the mountains with a light wagon all alone." While pressing forward he wrote: "I asked the Lord to send me a buffalo. . . . I looked around me and sped a buffalo bull, within fifty yards of my camp. . . . Taking deliberate aim at the animal, my first shot brought him down."<sup>17</sup>

On November 10, with buffalo in tow, Ephraim came upon the Martin Company. He wrote: "Flocking around me, one would say, 'Oh, please, give me some meat.' Another would exclaim, 'My poor children are starving, do give me a little'; and children with tears in their eyes would call out, 'Give me some, give me some.'"<sup>18</sup>

**Dan Jones**, the cook in Captain Grant's camp, had not anticipated staying on the trail long, but when the rescue wagons were turned into ambulance wagons and the handcarts discarded, the immigrant's baggage had to be cached, and he was called as the leader of 16 others, to guard it through the winter.

He wrote: "There was not money enough on earth to have hired me to stay. . . . I was not prepared to remain so



Ephraim Hanks: Obeying the Spirit © by Clark Kelley Price.



long away; but I remembered . . . that any of us would stay if called upon.”<sup>19</sup>

**Unsung Heros.** The rescuers were not the only heroes. Those rescued also performed heroically, buoyed up by the Spirit of the Lord. One example was twenty-six year old Susannah Stone Loyd who reported: “Only once did my courage fail. One cold dreary afternoon, my feet having been frosted, I felt that I could go no further, and withdrew from the little company, and sat down to await the end, being somewhat in a stupor. After a time, I was aroused by a voice, which seemed as audible as anything could be, which spoke to my very soul of the promises and blessings I had received, and which should surely be fulfilled, and that I had a mission to perform in Zion. I received strength, and was filled with the Spirit of the Lord, and arose and traveled on with a light heart.”<sup>20</sup>

Even after Grant’s rescue teams reached them, the grueling ordeal was not yet over for the emaciated Willie Company. Immediately ahead was the task of lugging handcarts up the formidable Rocky Ridge,

which rose over 700 feet in a two-mile stretch, in snow over a foot deep, during a blizzard with subzero temperatures! After achieving the summit, the beleaguered group of over 500 souls must then pull the handcarts another 10 miles to the campground at Rock Creek Hollow. The exhausting ordeal ended at Rock Creek for 13 of the intrepid pioneers, who were buried “3 or 4 abreast and 3 deep” in a common grave, covered with brush, dirt, and finally large rocks to discourage wolves. A few hours later, two men who helped dig the common grave, also died. Those laid to rest in the common grave at Rock Creek Hollow included **Bodil Mortensen**, 10 years old. Her parents, still in Denmark, had sent her on ahead and apparently didn’t learn of her death until arriving in Utah. **William Groves**, age 22, a laborer from England, helped dig the grave for 13 who died on October 23 and then died the next day. **James Kirkwood**, age 11, from Scotland, carried his four-year-old brother Joseph on his back over Rocky Ridge, then laid down and died of exhaustion. **Ella Nielson**, age 22, from Denmark, exhausted, had to be carried to Rock Creek. Two friends



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The Martin Handcart Company Bitter Creek, Wyoming, 1856 by Clark Kelley Price, © by Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

lay down next to her to keep her warm, but to no avail. After she died, her hair had to be clipped from the ice beneath her frozen body. Their sacrifice forever made Rock Creek Hollow a sacred place.

## HEROS OF A SECOND RESCUE

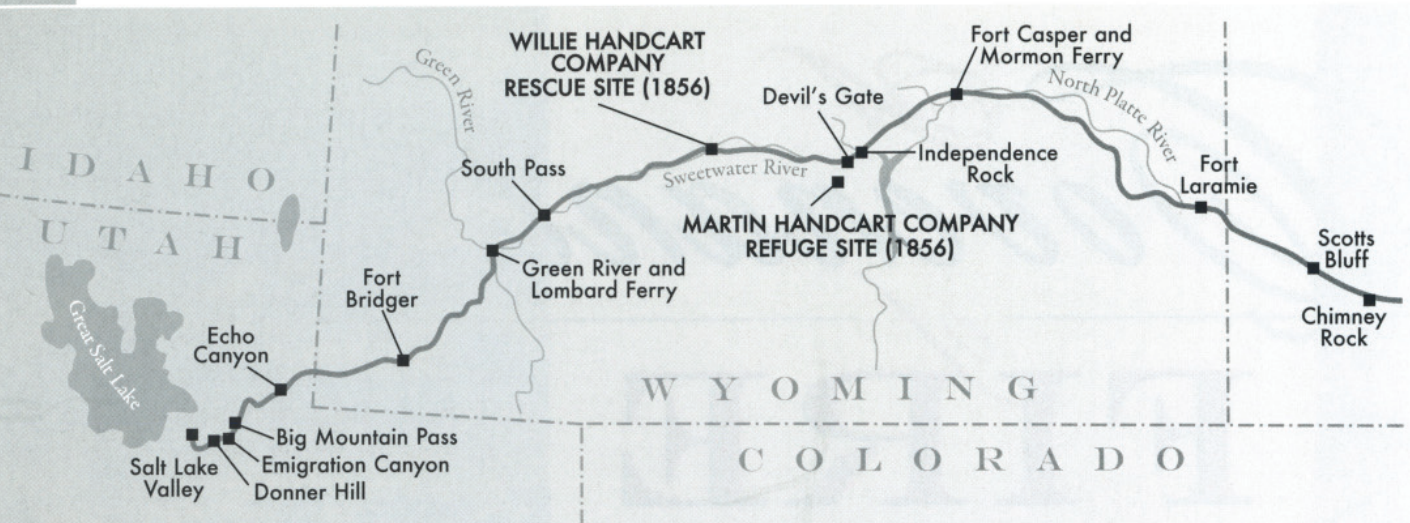
One hundred thirty-five years later, the newly installed president of Riverton Wyoming Stake, Robert Scott Lorimer, felt a spirit of suffering, as he repeatedly visited Rock Creek Hollow. He instituted a July 24th Pioneer Day celebration at Rock Creek Hollow and a youth conference every four years, including a handcart pull over Rocky Ridge.

Not knowing why, the stake presidency also made a Herculean effort (including 12-hour trips to Church headquarters) to be the first stake outside Utah's Wasatch Front to acquire two powerful computer systems, with new capacities for genealogical research. Pondering why they felt so compelled to acquire the computers, and why the great sense of urgency, suddenly, President Lorimer blurted out to

his counselor, "It's the Willie People! That's why we have the computers. Their temple work has not been done!"<sup>21</sup> Was it possible that the temple work for these courageous pioneers, approximately 220 of whom had given their lives for their testimonies of the restored gospel, hadn't yet been completed?

Using the new computers, President Lorimer and his counselors discovered that over 80 percent of the temple ordinances hadn't been completed for the 15 who had been buried at Rock Creek Hollow. Soon the work for these 15 was completed in the Ogden Temple. Not long afterward, in a special stake meeting, packets of over 1000 names were distributed to bishops, who assigned families in their wards to research them. Suddenly the stake family history center, that had been open only three hours a week, sprang into life and had to be kept open daily from 6 in the morning until 10 at night. Families had to be confined to half-hour computer sessions. Stake members found out that more than half of the temple ordinances for the pioneers of the Martin and Willie companies and their rescuers had not yet been





completed.<sup>22</sup> Over 20 percent of the 1100 names were researched by less-active members. Deacons quorums processed names through the TempleReady™ Program. Indian members of the stake caught the excitement, found 150 years of records on the reservation and started processing Shoshone and Arapaho names. During a 14-month period more than 4,200 individual temple ordinances were completed in behalf of the Willie and Martin handcart pioneers, their 1856 rescuers, and their families. In all, more than 90,000 pages of research were paginated and indexed.<sup>23</sup>

Two examples: 11-year-old daughter, Heika Lorimer, ordered and searched microfilms for hours for her assigned name James Alfred Peacock, but to no avail. She ordered more microfilm. "Finally, one Sunday afternoon her disappointment turned to joy. She found a birth record for James Alfred Peacock, saw that his temple work had not been completed, and processed and cleared his name for temple ordinances."<sup>24</sup>

Mary Hereford, a Lamanite member, who had been given a paper with her assigned name, was devastated when her home burned to the ground. As she watched, she prayed that the paper would be preserved. Although the kitchen microwave had melted, she said the paper was found on top of the refrigerator, completely burned, "except that my name and the person whose work was to be done were white." The research was completed a short time later.<sup>25</sup>

May we be rescuers of our families, living and deceased. May we prepare ourselves with the skills and

knowledge needed to rescue. May we be quick to alleviate suffering. In all things, may we seek and follow the voice of the Spirit. ▣

#### Notes

- 1 Rebecca Bartholomew and Leonard J. Arrington, *Rescue of the 1856 Handcart Companies*, Brigham Young University Charles Redd Center for Western Studies, 5.
- 2 Ibid., Appendix, 45–49.
- 3 *Deseret News* 6:245.
- 4 Bartholomew and Arrington, *Rescue*, 6.
- 5 Ibid., 7.
- 6 Ibid., 31.
- 7 Brigham Young Speech at the Bowery, October 5, 1856, *Deseret News*, October 15, 1856.
- 8 Journal History of the Church, LDS Church Archives, Family History Library at Brigham Young University, November 1, 1850.
- 9 Ibid., May 1, 1850.
- 10 Ibid., December 23, 1850.
- 11 Bartholomew and Arrington, *Rescue*, 25.
- 12 Le Roy Hafen and Ann W. Hafen, *Handcarts to Zion* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press in association with the Arthur H. Clark Co., Spokane, Washington, [1992], c1960), 133.
- 13 Hafen and Hafen, *Handcarts*, 133.
- 14 Bartholomew and Arrington, *Rescue*, 7.
- 15 Ibid., 16–17.
- 16 Ibid., 8.
- 17 Emigrating Journals of the Willie and Martin Handcart companies and the Hunt and Hodgett wagon trains, written and compiled by Lynne Slater Turner, August 1996, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Historical Department Archives, 130.
- 18 Hafen and Hafen, *Handcarts*, 135.
- 19 Daniel W. Jones, *Forty Years among the Indians* (Springville, Utah: Council Press, [2004?]), 72, 81–82, Appendix D.
- 20 Emigrating Journals, 224.
- 21 Susan Arrington Madsen, *The Second Rescue: The Story of the Spiritual Rescue of the Willie and Martin Handcart Pioneers* (Orem, Utah, Millennial Press: 1998), 24.
- 22 Ibid., 47.
- 23 Ibid., 41, 47.
- 24 Ibid., 42, 43.
- 25 Ibid., 43.





# *A* Covenant *of* FIRE

*By Elder Merrill J. Bateman*  
*Of the Presidency of the Seventy*

*Sons of the Utah Pioneers Days of '47 Sunrise Service*  
Assembly Hall  
July 24, 2006

**B**rothers and sisters, this is a memorable time and season. First, today commemorates the 159th anniversary of the entrance of the Mormon pioneers into Utah. After nearly three and one-half months of travel, the small band of 143 men, three women, and two children found the “right place” as they completed the journey from Winter Quarters to the Salt Lake Valley. Also, July 2006 marks the 150th anniversary of the departure of the Willie and Martin Handcart companies from the railroad terminus at Iowa City as they began their 1,300-mile trek on foot, pulling and pushing handcarts weighed down with almost 500 pounds of provisions. Their destination was also this valley. Although few experienced the severe hardships encountered by the members of the two handcart companies, all of the pioneers stepped out into the unknown with courage, determination, and perseverance based on their faith in God.

Faith was the driving force. It was not only a strong belief that propelled them forward, but a burning within that taught them the importance of “gathering to Zion,” to be with the Saints and build a “House of the Lord.” As the missionaries taught them the gospel in various parts of the world, their belief in God was kindled and rekindled by the Holy Spirit testifying to them of the reality of God’s personal nature, that He is the Father of









all, that Christ is His Only Begotten Son, that He has a plan for His children, and that the Father and the Son had spoken again through a prophet.

There are many pioneer examples of this fire within and the power and courage that it generates. I wish to share two stories this morning which illustrate not only the power of the Spirit associated with conversion, but also the inspiration received by the Lord's prophet as he directed the gathering process. The first is the story of a young couple, James Lewis and Mary Ann Huntley Burnham. James was a Christian minister in southern Illinois when he and his wife, Mary Ann, heard the missionaries preach the fulness of the restored gospel. James immediately understood that he lacked the authority to preach. Embracing wholeheartedly the message of the Restoration, James and his wife were baptized in 1843 and, with their four small children, made their way to Nauvoo to join with the Saints.

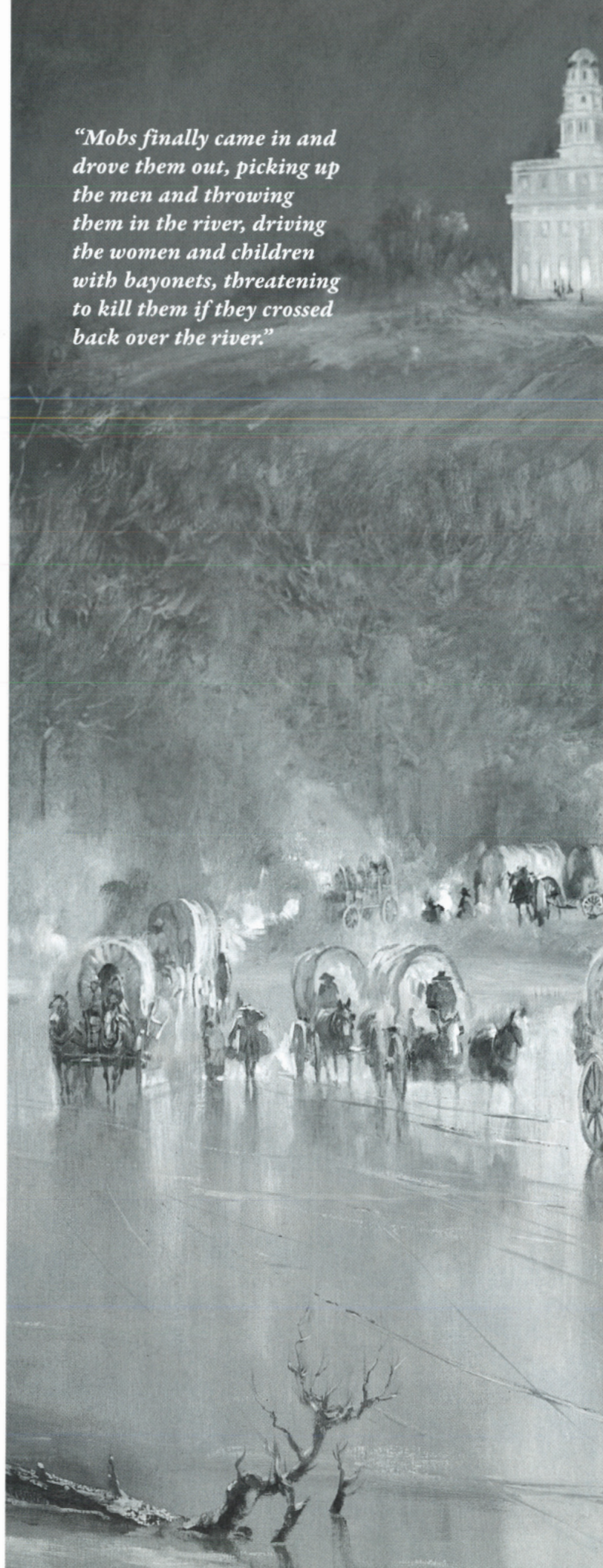
A year later, the couple's small daughter, Marie Antoinette, passed away and it also became evident that James, the father, was suffering from a lung disease. The dust in the quarry where he labored cutting rock for the Nauvoo Temple undoubtedly exacerbated the disease. Nevertheless, he and Mary Ann could hardly wait for the temple to be completed so they could become endowed and sealed for eternity.

In the summer of 1845, James's health grew worse and life began to ebb away. His passing occurred on October 8, four days before the birth of another daughter. These were trying times for Mary Ann and her little family of four. She was devoid of the world's goods.

She wrote her family in the eastern part of the country and told them of her plight. They invited her to return home. But, as her daughter wrote later, she had "cast her lot with the saints of God and would rather remain in poverty than have the wealth of the whole world elsewhere."<sup>1</sup> On January 5, 1846, Mary Ann received her endowment in the Nauvoo Temple. On February 6, 1846, she was sealed to her deceased husband, James. In spite of his death, she was now his for time and all eternity. Their dream of being sealed forever became a reality.

When the Nauvoo exodus began in February 1846, Mary Ann and her little family remained in the city, as she was unable to fund their departure. She watched the Saints leave the city and then the mob assume control. By the fall of 1846, the mob determined that all remaining Mormons had to leave Nauvoo. With some warning, she

*"Mobs finally came in and drove them out, picking up the men and throwing them in the river, driving the women and children with bayonets, threatening to kill them if they crossed back over the river."*







exchanged her property for a wagon and borrowed a yoke of cattle. She and her four little children along with others were forced from the city at gunpoint. They crossed the Mississippi and camped on the Iowa side in September. Elder Gerald N. Lund describes the scene in the following terms: "Mobs finally came in and drove them out, picking up the men and throwing them in the river, driving the women and children with bayonets, threatening to kill them if they crossed back over the river."<sup>2</sup> Mary Ann remembers the mob searching her wagon for arms, the obscene language they used, and the fear that gripped her heart as she wondered what fate lay ahead for her and her four young children.

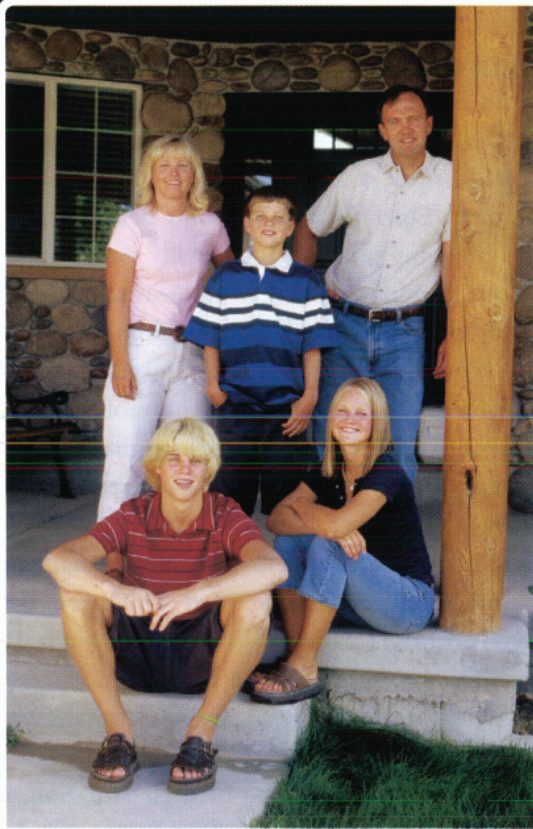
On September 25, 1846, Brigham Young, camped at Winter Quarters, received word about the Battle of Nauvoo and the final expulsion of the poverty-stricken Saints. The last remnant had been forced to leave the city—the poor, the widowed, and the orphans who were now camped in eastern Iowa on the banks of the Mississippi. Upon learning of their situation, and in spite of the desperate straits of the Saints who had just crossed Iowa and were camped on the banks of the Missouri River, Brigham Young gathered together the priesthood brethren and said: "The poor brethren and sisters, the widows and orphans, sick and destitute, are now lying on the west bank of the Mississippi, waiting for teams and wagons and means to remove them. Now is the time for labor. Let the fire of the covenant, which you made in the house of the Lord burn in your hearts like flame unquenchable."<sup>3</sup> President



Young then asked for those who had wagons and were able to cross Iowa to assist the destitute in joining the main body of the Saints. Within a few days, almost "a hundred wagons were moving east to rescue the poor."<sup>4</sup>

The fire of the covenant spoken of by President Young is not an imaginary but a real force in the lives of all faithful Saints. The rescuers as well as the last remnants on the banks of the Mississippi were strengthened by it. Most, if not all of us,





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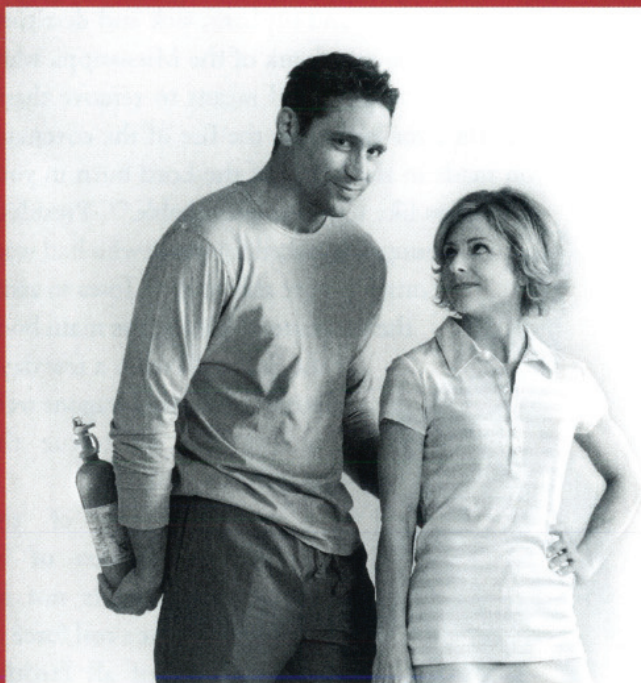
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have felt the burning as well. A personal witness received at baptism lights the fire. The intensity of the flame increases as we face adversity, and the furnace of affliction tempers our soul. The flame bursts into a full-fledged fire as we enter into and live temple covenants.

Mary Ann arrived in Winter Quarters late in the fall of 1846 and the fire within was again required to help her save and prepare for the journey to the Rocky Mountains. Within a few months of Mary Ann's arriving in Nebraska, the opportunity came to send her second and third sons (ages 10 and 8) with a family to the valley. Believing the separation would be a year or less, she gave her consent. But a short separation was not to be. For five years she scrimped and saved to gather the meager rations required, and with the help of friends she left the banks of the Missouri in 1852 for the valley. Can you imagine the joy of reunion as this mother with her oldest son and daughter embraced once again the two sons they had not seen in five years? Although the mother and her four living children had little in terms of the world's goods, they had everything that mattered—they had each other, they were an eternal family, and they were part of Zion.

A verse in the Doctrine and Covenants refers to the tragedy of those initially left behind in Nauvoo and makes plain the Lord's wishes regarding them. On January 14, 1847, a few months after the rescue, Brigham Young issued the following statement as the "word and will of the Lord":

"Let each company bear an equal proportion, according to the dividend of their property, in taking the poor, the widows, the fatherless, and the families of those who have gone into the army, that the cries of the widow and the fatherless come not up into the ears of the Lord against this people" (D&C 136:8).

James and Mary Ann's story is a small sample of the faith and spiritual commitment that burned within those at Nauvoo. It is also typical of the feelings that moved converts all over the world to leave their lands and answer the call to "gather to Zion."

One hundred and fifty years ago this month, the Willie and Martin Handcart companies left Iowa City bound for the Salt Lake Valley 1,300 miles to the west. Numerous stories of faith, courage, and determination emanate from this group as they proved faithful in their extremities.

The Willie and Martin companies were part of 10 handcart companies that traveled to Utah between 1856 and 1860. Although the trek was arduous for everyone, 8 of the 10 companies traveled without serious problems. Only the Willie and Martin expeditions, however, suffered the severe tragedy of extreme weather. But even in tragedy, these Saints never lost their faith in the Lord nor His willingness to sustain them.

The James Willie Company left on July 15, 1856, the Edward Martin Company 13 days later on July 28. It was late in the season. The leaders of both companies had





been warned about the possibility of snow in the higher elevations of Wyoming. In turn, they had discussed the matter with members of their companies. Some of the captains of hundreds had traveled the route many times and were confident that they could make it through. Three companies had already left and the Saints assigned to the Willie and Martin groups were anxious to be on their way. It had been 78 days since they left England and they had waited three weeks in Iowa for the carts to be built. May I share a story that illustrates the faith and conviction of those who traveled and suffered, but who never wavered.

A branch president in the London Conference decided in the spring of 1856 that it was time for him and his family to gather to Zion. He then forwarded funds to the British Mission office in Liverpool sufficient to purchase an ox team to convey himself, wife, and four children from Iowa City to Salt Lake City. About this same time, the handcart plan was submitted to the Saints in Europe with the suggestion that those able to emigrate by ox or horse team might consider the handcart and allow the excess funds to be used to help others. Because the branch president's wife was unused to travel and the ages of their four children ranged from six years to 11 months, he decided the family should go by ox team.

As emigration time approached, others in the branch indicated their desire to emigrate and be with him in the same company. Knowing that most could not afford an ox team, the branch president wrote British Mission headquarters asking to be reassigned to the handcarts and for the balance of his funds to be shared with others in his branch wanting to emigrate. At the Sunday sacrament and testimony meeting in which the branch president announced that his family would travel by handcart, a sister arose and gave her testimony using the gift of tongues. The interpretation was clearly given to the branch president, but he refrained from interpreting it for obvious reasons. After a pause, another sister arose and gave the interpretation as follows: "I, the Lord, am well pleased with the offering made by my

**"When he was called  
to go out into a  
place which he should after  
receive for an inheritance,  
obeyed; and he went out, not  
knowing whither he went."**

**—Hebrews 11:8.**

**By faith, [they] followed a  
prophet's voice to 'gather  
to Zion.'"**

servant . . . ; and notwithstanding he shall see the angel of death laying waste on his right hand and on his left, on his front and on his rearward, yet he and his family shall gather to Zion in safety, and not one of them shall fall by the way."

The good branch president, his family, and many of his branch members were part of approximately 600 members of the Martin Handcart Company, the last to leave Winter Quarters in late August 1856. Of those who began, about 450 entered the Salt Lake Valley on November 30, as one out of four was buried along the way. All could testify as to "the angel of death laying waste" during the journey.

One morning along the trail, after a very cold night, it appeared that the promise given to the branch president would not be fulfilled. The parents awoke to find their four-and-one-half-year-old, blue-eyed, fair-haired boy dead. The father took the child and began anointing him with consecrated oil and praying over him, calling upon the Lord to keep His promise that not one of the family should fall by the way in gathering to Zion. The body was cold and not a heartbeat or other sign of life was in the child. The father continued to administer, to chafe the limbs and body, and to call upon the Lord to fulfill His promise. After what seemed a very long time, the father thought he saw a slight flutter in the child's throat; this encouraged further rubbing, chafing, and administration, until finally, by God's power and blessing, the child opened his eyes and life returned. Through the rest of his life, the father was convinced that the boy would have been given up for dead and laid to rest with hundreds of others along the trail had it not been for the gift of the Spirit, which inspired a faith and assurance that God would answer his prayers as he administered to a little boy who was looked upon as dead (see *Juvenile Instructor* 37 [June 15, 1902]:12).

Like Abraham of old, the branch president, "when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went" (Hebrews 11:8). By faith, the branch president followed a prophet's voice to "gather to





Zion.” He was willing to share his means with others even though it meant increased hardship “for he looked for a city . . . whose builder and maker is God” (Hebrews 11:10).

Brothers and sisters, I pray that we may not shrink when adversity crosses our path. Elder Neal A. Maxwell has written:

“How [can] we expect to be joyous and to receive all that ‘the Father hath’ if we do not strive to become like Him? And, in fact, can we, on our scale, be like Him without sharing in the ‘fellowship of his sufferings’? . . . If in all this there is some understandable trembling, the adrenaline of affliction can help to ensure that our pace will be brisk rather than casual. His grace will cover us like a cloak—enough to provide for survival but too thin to keep out all the cold. The seeming cold is there to keep us from drowsiness, and gospel gladness warms us enough to keep going.”<sup>5</sup>

Sometimes I wonder if we are tried enough. It is obvious that our trials are different. In many cases, today’s trials may be good fortune, excess wealth, selfishness, the pervasiveness of and easy access to pornography, the need to protect family and especially children from moral decay, and the challenge of good being called evil and evil good. It is my prayer, brothers and sisters, that the fire of the covenant will continue to burn within us, providing a compass for the decisions to be made and the courage to make those decisions, that we may remain true to the heritage provided by our pioneer fathers. This I ask in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ▣

#### Notes

1 Mary Ann Burnham Freeze, Burnham Family Records in possession of Marilyn S. Bateman.

2 Gerald N. Lund, “The Fire of the Covenant,” in *The Best of Women’s Conference* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 2000), 305.

3 Susan Easton Black and William G. Hartley, *Iowa Mormon Trail* (Orem, Utah: Helix Publ., c1997), 163.

4 Ibid.

5 Neal A. Maxwell, *Even As I Am* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1991, c1982), 108, 209.

*A Covenant of Fire* by Elder Merrill J. Bateman © by Intellectual Reserve. Used by Permission.

*Visuals: Trail of Sacrifice: Valley of Promise* © by Clark Kelley Price (18–19). *Crossing the Mississippi River* art © by Glen Hopkinson (20–21). *Handcarts* photo by John Luke (23).



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## The Mormon Pioneer Saga

by C. DuWayne Schmidt

Last fall my longtime close friend, Robert Cundick, approached me with an intriguing proposal. His wife, Charlotte, having just completed a fulfilling year of service as president of the Canyon Rim Company of the Daughters of the Utah Pioneers, challenged Bob to commit to a comparable contribution to the Sons of the Utah Pioneers to honor his own pioneer heritage.

The result is an inspiring new multi-media book entitled *The Mormon Pioneer Saga*, a joint publication of the Sons and Daughters of Utah Pioneers. Through word, music and dance, it offers a new way for the reader/listener to enter the world of the pioneers. A first of its kind, this concise small book contains a combination CD/DVD in addition to the printed text.

In the spirit of service, the poet, writer, composer, and all performing organizations have donated their work for this project so as to keep costs as low as possible.

The proceeds from the sale of the *Saga* will go towards the Pioneer endowment fund. We encourage the chapters to purchase them from the National Office and make them available to their members and others.

Distributed by Brigham Young University Creative Works, *The Mormon Pioneer Saga* is also available at Deseret Book Company and other retail outlets. List price: \$24.95.

## SUP October 14th Symposium

*The Rescues of the Willie and Martin Handcart Companies*

The National Society of the Sons of Utah Pioneers will host their annual Historical Symposium on Saturday, October 14, 2006, at the National Headquarters Building, 3301 East 2920 South, with the theme "The Rescues of the Willie and Martin Handcart Companies."

As we come to the end of the commemorative year, the SUP symposium will focus upon the rescues of the handcart companies—both the physical 1856 rescues and the 1990s symbolic rescues by the Riverton Wyoming Stake of the land and of the "Second Rescue" temple work for those who did not survive the trek.

The Symposium will begin with registration at 12:30 p.m. Speakers for the afternoon symposium will

include the following: (1) **Dr. James B. Allen**, professor emeritus from Brigham Young University, will provide the historical perspective for the handcart companies and the rescues; (2) **DeVirl and Joan Byington** will make a dramatic presentation of Ephraim Hanks, a rescuer to the Martin's Company. Joan is a great granddaughter of Ephraim Hanks and both she and her husband have served missions to the Martin's Cove, Wyoming Visitor's Center; and (3) **Robert Scott Lorimer**, former stake president of the Riverton Wyoming Stake, will provide the background and history of the development of the land at Martin's Cove and at Rocky Ridge and the "Second Rescue" operation.

An evening dinner will be held at 5:30 p.m. with a special guest speaker to be announced. Several musical and video presentations will be made during the afternoon and evening programs. Tickets are available from the SUP Headquarters, 801-484-4441 or 1-888-827-2746. **Cost for the symposium and the dinner is \$20. For the dinner only it is \$15.** Seating is limited, so early registration is encouraged.

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# Pioneer Spotlight

By Angus Belliston

1994 SUP National President

## James Thomas & Cyrus H. Wheelock

*Simple Mormon*

*Pioneers filled with faith  
and integrity.*



*James Thomas*

Neither of the two men featured in this story were famous or even very well known. They were simply Mormon pioneers, filled with faith and integrity, who did their very best and left a legacy for those who followed.

The earliest pioneer ancestor of our family, James Thomas Belliston, emigrated from England to Utah six years after the arrival of Brigham Young's famous company. With James Thomas came his wife, Louisa, one baby girl, and three little boys, ages 5, 7, and 9. My own grandfather, Thomas, was the seven-year-old. Two little boys and a little girl had died before they left England; three more children were born after they arrived. Only four of the 10 children reached adulthood.

James Thomas was a professional scale-maker in England. He wasn't well suited to the hazardous ocean travel from England to New Orleans and up the Mississippi River. He and his family were even less suited to travel by ox team across the western desert and not at

all familiar with frontier life in the Territory of Deseret. But they had accepted the call to Zion.

On the journey to Zion in 1853, the staging area for the trek across the prairie was Keokuk, Iowa, near Nauvoo. Soon after the Bellistons left Keokuk with a wagon train in the late spring, it became apparent that they were overloaded for the journey. The captain of the company began to complain that the Belliston family was one of several families who were delaying the travel. James Thomas sacrificed his valuable set of tools for only five dollars. Next their stove had to go. Finally, the captain advised them to trade their young and strong team of oxen, which were not "well-broke," with five dollars to boot, for an old team. But shortly, one of the old team got into a mud hole and perished. The other old oxen was sold for \$20.

At this point, the captain and the company moved on, leaving the Belliston family stranded and lonely on the plains, with no way to continue westward. It seemed a

desperate situation and the family had no means nor skills to save themselves. The mother and father and four little children waited in that circumstance, alone on the prairie of Iowa, for several days.

Finally, another pioneer company appeared on the horizon—this one led by a captain of a different nature. After Captain Cyrus Wheelock had enquired about their situation, he uttered the memorable words, "If Brother Wheelock gets into the Valley, Brother Belliston shall too, if he wants to go." He certainly did want to go! The family went and arrived safely in the valley. James Thomas, the skilled scale-maker, made a meager living for his family making adobes, then as a tin smith, then as a farmer.

Let me tell you more about faithful Cyrus H. Wheelock (*right*).

By the fateful year of 1856 he had already distinguished himself for his faith and his faithfulness. In Nauvoo, he had twice appealed on Joseph Smith's behalf to Governor Thomas Ford. He had been with the Prophet in the Carthage Jail and had left with him the six shooter pistol Joseph later used for his defense. Cyrus served a mission to England in 1846, then came to Utah in the fall of 1847. But in 1853 he was back in Iowa, leading his company west from Keokuk, when he discovered





that refugee family lost and alone on the plains. Cyrus was then 43 years old.

Now it was late 1856. In September Cyrus and others were returning with Apostle Franklin D. Richards from yet another two-year mission to England. The party passed the Martin and Willey companies west of Winter Quarters, just starting their long trek. They worried about the late season and the Wyoming winter coming on them. When the returning missionaries arrived safely in Salt Lake Valley, they reported to Brigham Young about the late company of handcarts still on the plains.

Brigham had no ordinary way of knowing that, by then those pioneers were at the point of starvation and early snows were threatening them with disaster. But under the Spirit's prompting, the prophet opened the October Conference proceedings with a call for volunteers for a rescue party to leave immediately. Cyrus Wheelock answered the call. He had spent less than two days with his family, after being away from them for two years. But his was one of the first wagons out.

The snows soon became an almost insurmountable obstacle for the rescuers. A few became discouraged by the freezing cold at the summit of the Continental Divide and turned back. Cyrus and the first company of rescuers pressed on, but soon dispatched an "express" with two men (possibly four), including Cyrus Wheelock, in a light wagon to move on ahead. Cyrus was one of the first rescuers to reach the Willie Company and then to push on in search of the Martin company.

The hardest of men were pushed to their limit as they fought the cold and starvation to carry the weakened and dying to safety. Cyrus Wheelock stayed with these sufferers until they were safely in sight of their new home. Then on November 25 he was dispatched to tell Brigham Young the Martin Company would enter the valley within the week. At last, when his urgent duty was done, Cyrus took time to enjoy his family, after their long separation.

Cyrus Wheelock remained faithful throughout his long life. Ultimately, he married six wives and reared many children. In Utah, he became a member of the Salt Lake City Council and the Territorial Legislature. Four years after his part in the 1856 rescue of the handcart companies, he was again on a mission in England. As he returned, he was the captain of a company of 380 Mormon immigrants who came to

Utah in 1861. He served other missions in the United States and was president of the Northern States Mission in 1878–1879.

This valiant man left us, as part of his testimony about rescuing lost and hungry souls, a famous priesthood anthem. It has special significance when we think of his rescue of James Thomas and his frightened family on the Great Plains and of his valiant help in the rescue of the starving souls in the handcart companies, 150 years ago. ▀

*Cyrus Wheelock, born 1813 in Henderson, New York, joined the Church in 1839 and filled a mission to Vermont and other states. He came with the Saints to Utah, returning in 1878 as president of the Northern States Mission. He lived in Mount Pleasant, Utah, where he wrote a number of widely used hymns. He died in 1894.*

(See: <http://mormonlit.lib.byu.edu/>)

***"Ye Elders of Israel" by Cyrus H. Wheelock***

*Ye elders of Israel, come join now with me  
And seek out the righteous, where'er they may be;  
In desert, on mountain, on land, or on sea,  
And bring them to Zion, the pure and the free.*

*The harvest is great, and the laborers are few;  
But if we're united, we all things can do;  
We'll gather the wheat from the midst of the tares  
And bring them from bondage, from sorrows and snares.*

*We'll go to the poor, like our Captain of old,  
And visit the weary, the hungry, and cold;  
We'll cheer up their hearts with the news that he bore  
And point them to Zion and life evermore.*

***Chorus:***

*O Babylon, O Babylon, we bid thee farewell;  
We're going to the mountains of Ephraim to dwell.*



# Guest Editorial

## JOURNEY BY HANDCART

**I**t was 1856, nine years after the first Mormon pioneers came into the valley with wagon trains that the handcart pioneers started on their trek. The Perpetual Emigration Fund was exhausted, so there was no money to help the hundreds of new converts to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints make the trip to Zion. Many of these new Saints were poor but eager to join with the rest of the members in their new home in the West. Brigham Young was determined to find a way for them to come to the promised land. He said, "If they can't ride to Utah, let the people build themselves handcarts and walk." Mostly coming from Europe, enough people arrived over the next four years to make 10 handcart companies. The leaders of these companies were usually returning missionaries who knew how to organize the people and keep order in the camps and companies.

From 1856–1860, most of the companies came with few problems. In fact, travel was easier because they didn't have to worry about wagons breaking down, feed for the oxen and cattle, and the slow pace that was required because of the loaded wagons and the many animals to care for. That is, except for two groups, the Willie Handcart Company and the Martin Handcart Company, and the Hunt and Hodgett wagon trains that came with these two companies. Because they left late in the year and the winter storms came early in the year they faced greater hunger, more intense cold weather, and tragic situations because of the raging storms they had to face.

James Godson Bleak and family (James, 26; Elizabeth, 27; Richard, 6; Thomas, 4; and Mary, an infant) immigrated to Utah in 1856 sailing from Liverpool with 856 Saints on the ship *Horizon* on May 25, 1856, under the charge of Captain Edward Martin. After arriving in the United States they traveled 250 miles before



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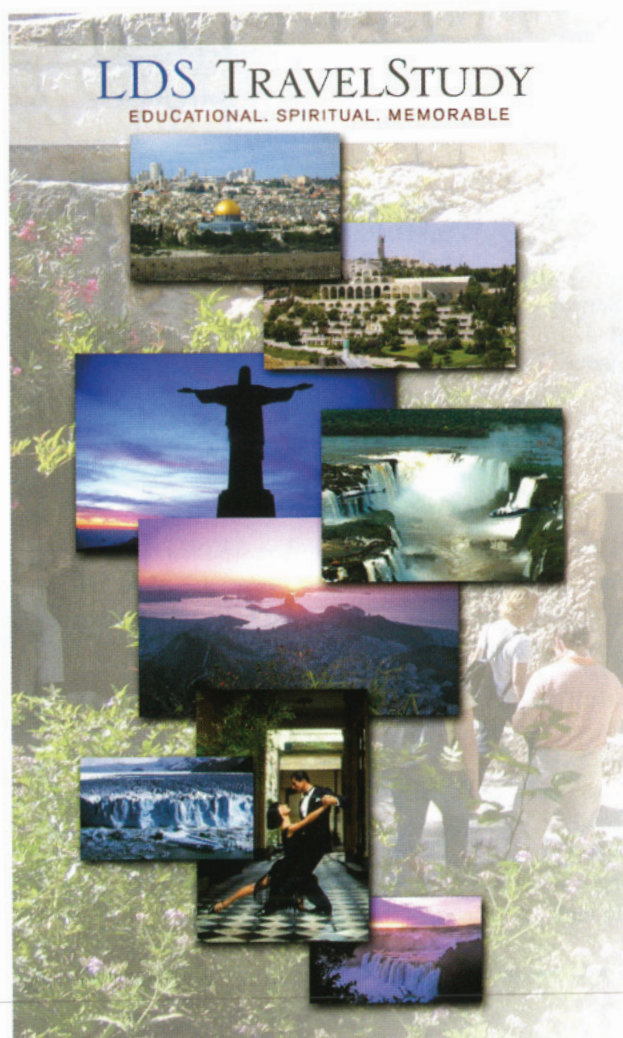
reaching Iowa City on Wednesday, July 9. They unloaded and hauled their baggage 3 1/2 miles northwest of Iowa City, the outfitting point for that year's immigration. James describes what he saw when they arrived there, "Here we found hundreds in their newly made tents. Scores of young girls, others of maturer years—mothers and grand-mothers, busy as bees sewing on other tents and wagon covers. In the Carpenter shop and sheds, fifteen to twenty men were at work on the hand-carts. They continued from peep of day till dark of night, from this until the last handcart necessary was finished for the last company." He went on to record in his diary, "The male members of Hunt's and Hodgett's Independent Company wagon companies were breaking and taming their steers with a rope around their horns dragging a green tree log behind, before being trusted on the lead or tongue of a wagon." (Diary of James G. Bleak)

As a result of a late start, poor communication with

more knowledgeable Church leaders, and over zealotness on the possibility of miracles, 135 persons of the 575 Saints who began died in the snows of Wyoming (History of James Godson Bleak, Daughters of Utah Pioneers files).

James wrote in his diary that on September 5 they received their first violent storm, making it so that instead of traveling thirty miles a day, they could make only six miles a day. Storms continued increasing in intensity. The weather was severe and food rations were reduced. On November 9 they traveled five miles and James's feet were frozen so badly that the flesh dropped from his heels. He couldn't walk any farther so he was forced to ride on the handcart while his wife pulled it and the children pushed. (His feet were frozen so badly that he was handicapped the rest of his life.)

On November 21 they reached Green River, where they had a miraculous experience, one that tested their



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faith and fulfilled an earlier promise. Their four-year-old son, Thomas, fell into the river. By the time they got him out he appeared to be dead. After working over him for a long time, trying to revive him, the members of the company pleaded with James to bury the child. He refused, and he and Elizabeth worked and prayed fervently, and finally Thomas revived. James had been promised in a blessing before leaving England that he would bring his family safely to Utah. He wouldn't give up. Six months and one week after the Bleaks left England they arrived in Salt Lake City on November 30, 1856.

Mary Bunting Ashton and her husband came on the ship *Horizon* also, and she pushed a handcart the entire distance across the plains, gathering up her skirts to ford the many streams along the way. Her husband had poor health so many times she pushed the cart with him in it (DUP files).

Another *Horizon* passenger, Sarah Barlow Ashton, was in delicate health and when the company arrived at Florence, Nebraska, she gave birth to a daughter but was so weak that she and the baby died and were buried together at this place. A sad husband and three daughters were left to mourn a mother who gave her life for her family.

One may wonder why these people made this terrible journey and how did any of them survive. Surely it was a test of their strength and faith. Many did not survive and this was a test for those who loved them. The survivors didn't talk about the trek much and did little, if any, complaining. In fact, one of the survivors later said, "Whenever I tell the story of the handcart companies of '56, my heart is filled with pride and thanksgiving to think that I have passed through such hardships for the cause which I embraced and loved so much." (Farm Quarterly-Handcart Trek, July 20, 1956). He most likely spoke for the rest of the survivors also.

It was probably because they endured such tragic experiences that they grew in strength and were able to endure the hardships of creating a new society in a new land with new associates from many walks of life.

Historians will continue to write about these courageous people and families, and other caring persons will continue to honor them and emulate their dedication to a worthy cause. ▀

**CORRECTIONS:** In the last issue of *Pioneer* magazine (2006, Vol. 53, #2, 13, 29), it was inadvertently stated that the heroic Brigham Young statue at the State Capitol building was sponsored by the Sons of the Utah Pioneers. The statue was sponsored by a resolution of the Utah State Legislature, which created the Brigham Young Statue Commission.

—Also in the last issue of *Pioneer* magazine (2006, Vol. 53, #2, 17), "Follow the Day-to-Day Trek of the Martin and Willie Handcart Companies," the website address was printed incorrectly—it should be:

**handcart.byu.edu** (not [www.handcart.byu.edu](http://www.handcart.byu.edu)).

## SUP New Members

### At Large

Wesley B. Morgan  
James Freeman  
Rose

### Box Elder

Charles R. Kellogg

### Centerville

Duane C. Price

### Cotton Mission

Robert Thornley

### Harmony

Mark Forsyth

### Hurricane Valley

DeVon Armstrong  
Larry Bergen  
Ronald G.  
Heywood

Darwin P. Leavitt

Jesse Lawrence  
Lemmon

LaVar Jay

McAllister

Richard Price

John Tippetts

Ray L. Williams

**Lehi:** Valjo  
Woolstenhulme

### Mountain Valley

James W. Ritchie

### Ogden Pioneer

Hal Lee Stoddard

### Ogden Valley

Dan D. Rhodes  
Michael D. Rhodes

### Salt Lake City

Edwin H. Burgoyne  
Robert C. Sloan

### Settlement Canyon

William Edward  
Mair

### Sevier Valley

Carl M. Holmes

### Temple Fork

Charles W. Futrell  
Ferron Perkes

### Upper Snake River Valley

Barry Boyle

### New Life Member

James Edward  
Hansen, Box Elder  
D. Earl Hurst,  
Brigham Young  
Rick Peterson,  
Sevier Valley

## Chapter Eternal

In loving memory of our SUP brothers who have recently joined their pioneer forebears on the other side of the veil. Pioneer rejoices in the lives of these good men and extends its sympathies and good wishes to families and loved ones.

Everett Hale Call, SUP  
National President, 1988

Alan Clark,  
Upper Snake River Valley

Keith Glade, At Large

Dean R. Grover,

Upper Snake River Valley

David Holbrook, Lehi

Spencer Duane Madsen,  
Mesa

Louis Mousley, At Large

Roy Stoddard, Eagle Rock

Rueland Ward,

Upper Snake River Valley

John C. Wood,

Ogden Pioneer



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